

What We (Un)Do With Dreams

Symbolizing Incompleteness Within the Work of Becoming in Teacher Education

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IN A CONTEMPORARY EDUCATIONAL MOMENT marked by positivism and predictable learning outcomes, knowledge of complex social and emotional realities is relegated to the margins of educational experience. Within the context of teacher preparation, while we tend to emphasize “doing” through the application of knowledge and skills, less attention is paid to the repressions, silences, and breakdowns of meaning that “undo” our pedagogical and self-understandings. In the process of learning to become a teacher, the sense of doing and undoing are necessarily very close. A consideration of learning to become a teacher as both a doing and an undoing shifts the focus away from familiar discourses of mastery over knowledge and professional competencies to take the side of what Britzman (2016) has termed, “the emotional situation of human incompleteness” (p. 2). Britzman’s emphasis on interiority suggests there is something more to teacher preparation than linearity or predictable outcomes. For Britzman, the anxiety of incompleteness, at once an obstacle to and a resource for development, sets the stage for learning to imagine what is missing or unknowable.

Through an inquiry into the dream work of teacher preparation, this paper will explore how subjectivity and self-understanding are constituted through emotional experiences of uncertainty and internal change. Sigmund Freud (1914/2001), in his slim volume, *On Dreams*, describes dream work as, “the process by which the change from latent to manifest content is executed” (p. 8). A central function of the dream work is the transformation of latent, unknowable dream thoughts into manifest, knowable, if provisional, meanings. Dreams are an experimental form of thinking and action, Freud insisted, although this unconscious process is radically different from conscious reasoning. Instead of thinking in coherent ideas and concepts, dreams dramatize as-yet unknown thoughts, fragments, and feelings by transforming them into visual material. Like art, the dream work helps transfigure experiences from everyday reality, giving them new, symbolic form in ways that keep us alive to future possibilities. As Kelley (2002) argues, the symbolic labor of dream work is itself a vital method that enables thinking about and working through the struggles we face, individually and collectively, with creative agency.

In teacher preparation programs, pre-service students are tasked with imagining as-yet unknowable professional futures for themselves in ways that are necessarily out of step with what Clarke and Phelan (2017) refer to as, “the discourses of standardized teaching identities” (p. 6). Even as they are encouraged to imagine, however tentatively, their future classrooms and teaching identities, students must somehow integrate into their developing self-understanding the language of professional competency and expertise: differentiated instruction, learning outcomes, classroom management, and so on. Out of step with pedagogical mastery, the emotional situation of learning in teacher preparation often demands another venue of expression: through dreams, symptoms, or other unconscious actions. Phillips (2006), a contemporary psychoanalyst and interpreter of Freud, writes,

The dream is an opportunity to talk about obscure resources; apparently unheard-of desires, or versions of ourselves, or predictions of the future, or messages about our physiology or our destiny, or our wishes. Paradoxically, for the dream valuers, for the keepers of dreams, in our dreams we are at once most obscurely and most essentially ourselves. (p. 113)

As Phillips suggests, rather than providing access to an “essential” identity or authentic self-understanding, dreams offer up the obscure, symbolic resources needed to bring emotional complexity and depth to our narratives of becoming. What would it mean to attend to the various forms these symbolic resources take in teacher preparation and understand what we make of them? In the face of bureaucratic demands and deadening structures, how might our associative objects open new possibilities for enlivened thinking and narratives of becoming?

In 2017, I left my position as Associate Professor of Art Education at a private art school in Chicago to start a new BFA in Art Education program at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), a large, urban public research university on the city’s southwest side. I grew up in Canada, where I completed all of my formal education in the public system, so a mid-career move to join the faculty at a public institution felt familiar, a bit like coming home. I was hired with the understanding that UIC’s previous art education program could be “restarted” by submitting a simple, one-page program change form to the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). I filled out the form and sent it to ISBE. The response was swift and unequivocal: too much time had passed since the previous program was suspended in 2010; on behalf of my new institution, I would be required to submit a full proposal to the state licensure board. My experience of writing the proposal was haunted by questions: Is this simply a bureaucratic exercise? Am I just jumping through hoops? Will anyone actually read this thick document? What do these descriptions of learning outcomes have to do with understanding the complexities of professional development and learning to become a teacher? The writing felt disconnected from reality, and yet the end goal of establishing a professional licensure program was entirely dependent on the outcome of this process.

Educational administrators who have worked on program approval or accreditation processes can speak to the confounding nature of the experience. We are asked to map competencies, dispositions, assessments, standards, and learning outcomes, a process of “alignment” that involves making predictable connections between the various metrics. The standardization process, as Clarke and Phelan (2017) argue, “leaves little opportunity for teachers to think for themselves and to practice without an externally imposed end in mind” (p. 38). In recounting what is arguably a mundane, “behind the scenes” story about administrative labor, I aim to highlight conflicts between the external structures and demands of my new role and what I

can now recognize, through an experience of dreaming that I discuss later in the paper, as my own internal, emotional situation of incompleteness. Excited to be in a position to build something new, at the same time, I felt overwhelmed by the anxiety of high stakes and fear of failure. The task before me was at once practical and psychical: in writing the proposal for a new program, I had to make a relation to a reality that I would have preferred not to think about.

Sonu et al. (2020), in this volume, describe this anxious relation as, “the trouble of embodying a sense of self within existing structures” (p. 24). While anxiety can overwhelm and inhibit the capacity to think and to learn, psychoanalytic views of education insist that the work of thinking, “cannot be extricated from the anxiety situation that calls thought forth” (Britzman, 2016, p. 15). The new BFA in Art Education program was approved in December 2017, and the first cohort of students was admitted to the program in fall of 2018. The program is a work in progress, still in the early stages of becoming.¹ While the success of the accreditation process is certainly a positive outcome, this paper will not offer the reader an object lesson in proposal writing. In what follows, I explore the possibility of “other” stories to be told, and the capacity for thought recovered, from these institutional demands and the ways in which we navigate them.

In the paper, the work of program development opens inquiry into the emotional situation of thinking and symbolization necessary for capacious subjectivity in teacher preparation. In the first section, I explore the uses of dream data as symbolizing the uneven, psychical terrain of development in an adjacent scene of professional learning: medical education. Medical education and teacher preparation have in common the wish to equip students with the professional knowledge and skills they will need to intervene in, and possibly even transform, the lives of others. Medical education and teacher preparation also have in common the objective of bringing students into contact with other people in transitional states of human subjectivity and learning. Through a discussion of medical students’ dream-narratives, we will see how vivid descriptions of the psychic life of professional training are useful in conceptualizing the developmental role of dreaming in experiences of learning to become a teacher. Following a discussion of the dream life of professional education, I consider how structures of knowledge and accountability operate defensively in teacher preparation, reinforcing a sense of certainty or “emotional closure” (Clarke & Phelan, 2017) and foreclosing thought. Toward the paper’s conclusion, I work closely with a psychoanalytic view of anxiety, a central feature of development, to suggest how the dream work of teacher preparation opens spaces of symbolic fluency and interpretive play that may deepen and enrich the meaning of professional life.

Dreams as Doing and Undoing

Marcus (2003), in a qualitative study of medical students’ dreams about medical school, suggests how emotional change is prompted in students by the “reality events” of their experience of medical education. Reality events include the major milestones and transition points that students must navigate as they move through the curriculum, beginning in the first year, with a lesson on dissection. On the initial experience of learning how to dissect a human body, Marcus writes, “The cadaver is usually the first dead body the student has seen or handled. It is viewed without psychological preparation” (p. 370). In Marcus’s account, the placement of dissection at the beginning of the curriculum suggests something about the culture, in medical school, of dropping students into the deep end of the swimming pool, so to speak, in order to see how they handle the pressure. From the very beginning, anxiety is animated.²

In Marcus's (2003) study, dream data collected from students in the first year of their medical training depicts a common theme: the students dreamed they were *being* dissected, rather than *doing* the dissecting themselves. In the students' descriptions of their dreams, cadavers are transformed into live patients, students become surgeons, and frightening and invasive procedures are juxtaposed with surgical settings of care. Unsurprisingly, these condensed symbols are coupled with intense emotional activity on the part of the dreamer. According to Marcus, in the students' dissection dreams, "the self-representation of the student-dreamer is full of overwhelming panic, helplessness, and frozen paralysis" (p. 371). Symbolic reversals of position are also evident in the students' dreams; for example, students describe being transformed from medical students—the recipients of medical education—into patients or cadavers. In their dreams, the students' wish to heal others is complicated by their worries about having the power to do harm. The dreams conjure scenes of anxiety over matters of life and death. Will the students' survive their encounter with medical education? In their dreams, the life-saving procedures the students are learning to perform in reality become internalized, personalized, and deeply conflicted.

In Freud's (1914/2001) theory of the dream work, dreams often function as a form of wish fulfillment, giving the dreamer agency over what may, in reality, be unthinkable, unacceptable, or out of reach. For Freud, dreams are a place where the superego, or censor, is relaxed, allowing human conflicts of desire and dependency to emerge under the cover of sleep. In *On Dreams*, Freud (1914/2001) describes the various symbolic mechanisms at work in the dream presentation, which he refers to as, "the peculiar language of the dream" (p. 23). Through the mechanism of condensation, for example, multiple meanings, memories, and references are compressed into a single action or visual element, "linked up," as Freud puts it, "with our impression of the day" (p. 19). The "illogic" of dreams also operates through symbolic transformations, or reversal of one thing into its opposite. Freud writes,

Conceptions which stand in opposition to one another are preferably expressed in dreams by the same element. The dream never utters the *alternative* "either-or," but accepts both as having equal rights in the same connection. When "either-or" is used in the reproduction of dreams, it is ... to be replaced by "*and*." (p. 24, emphasis in original)

The subject of the dream is the divided subject: versions of ourselves that are known and familiar co-exist with parts of ourselves that are difficult to know. For example, in the medical students' dreams, the students appeared as both the object of medical intervention, the vulnerable patient, *and* the subject, the master surgeon at work in the operating theater. The symbolic language of dreams makes room for complexity and uncertainty within the dreamer's relation to reality: the dreamer is freed up, internally, to inhabit multiple positions and feeling-states at the same time. Moreover, there is an emotional sense in which the dreamer is active and doing, while simultaneously feeling vulnerable and undone.

The psychoanalyst Giuseppe Civitarese (2014), in *The Necessary Dream*, offers a useful account of how the understanding of dream life has evolved since Freud's time. Among Freud's major insights is that dreams function as the royal road to the unconscious. In our dreams, our most unacceptable wishes and desires are fulfilled, albeit in concealed or disguised form (Kofman, 1988). According to Civitarese (2014), contemporary psychoanalysts take a different view of dreaming, understanding dream life as fundamentally creative. A dream provides a generative context for using unconscious material to process the meaning of emotional experience. Civitarese writes, "The dream does not hide meaning, but creates it; it does not censor but rather expresses

something new. Dreaming is the function of the mind entrusted with managing the aesthetic experience of the world” (p. 103). From this vantage, dreaming is equivalent to thinking in the most creative sense of the term; as we dream, we learn to live with, and find truth in, the ambiguity and fragility of meaning-making. Ogden (2010) describes contemporary psychoanalysis as, “the era of thinking about thinking” (pp. 317–18), by which he marks a shift in focus from the content of what a person thinks about to the way a person goes about thinking. This sense of thinking as aesthetic activity turns our attention to the psychological art of the dream work, in which the symbolic conditions we create internally form webs of connection that may inhibit or sustain us in our relations with the world outside of ourselves.

The dream data in Marcus’s (2003) study offers glimpses of the “evolving emotional storyline” (p. 368) of students’ changing self-representations within their relation to medical education. Marcus writes,

The dreams ... picture the relationship of the student to the practice of student medicine, to educational experiences and the system of medical pedagogy, and to parts of themselves the students wish but fear to transform. They fear the experience, the method, and the result of medical pedagogy. (p. 372)

As the medical students moved through the middle and later years of their training, their dreams hinted at additional correspondences between the symbolic transformations in their dreams and the reality-events they were experiencing in their medical training program. For example, during the semester when the students were studying pathology (the study of disease within specific body parts), they began to picture *themselves in parts* in their dreams. Things became quite primitive. At the same time as the students were taking courses that focused on specific organs, cells, and systems of the body, they began to complain the curriculum was fragmented and repetitive. Worth noticing in relationship to teacher education is how the medical students’ specific complaints about the curriculum seem to line up with a focus, at that point in their program, on rote memorization and relentless testing. Marcus (2003) writes,

Students now consciously feel the medical curriculum is torturing them. At this time, they can be observed to organize committees to meet with the faculty to try to change the curriculum. They focus on the schedule and the content, but not the process of medical education. (p. 376)

Marcus’s study of the dream work of medical education offers teacher preparation an internal, psychological vocabulary for understanding how we are affected by our professional training and how the structures of curriculum are lived, internalized, and transformed. We might think, for example, of how pre-service students tend to feel impatient with theory, and preoccupied with classroom management, as they move into their clinical training in fieldwork and student teaching.

In the medical students’ dreams, images of body parts symbolized their relation to the curriculum; they experienced the coursework, along with the endless testing for mastery over knowledge, concretely, as a series of fragmented and disjointed parts. The students’ desire to change the schedule and content of the curriculum operated as a defense against thinking as a means to make contact with the internal, emotional situation of medical education. Faced with an overwhelming experience of what they do not yet know or understand, the students looked outside of themselves, and toward the curriculum, as something to be altered or fixed. The “evolving

emotional storyline” (Marcus, 2003, p. 368) of medical education is, thus, a narrative of uneven development (Britzman, 1998, 2012, 2016), at once a story of internal transformation and becoming and a story of how psychological defenses work to protect the vulnerable subject against the pain of integration, the very condition required for thinking about emotional reality. In the next section, while I will not be talking about pre-service students’ dreams, I will look to the conditions and structures of teacher preparation as constitutive of anxiety and defended subjectivity. I consider how external demands for certainty and professional competence meet the internal world of defenses against the vulnerability and sense of incompleteness needed for growth and learning.

(Un)doing Emotional Closure in Teacher Preparation

Teacher educators, those of us who work closely with pre-service students as they move through the structures and milestones of teacher preparation programs, bear witness to the anxiety students feel in the face of seemingly relentless external demands and evaluative measures. Even as they are undergoing profound shifts in self-understanding and internal change, students are expected to demonstrate what they know and what they can do. Clarke and Phelan (2017) characterize the contemporary field of teacher preparation as imbued with, “the tension between settled being and emergent becoming” (p. 4). With Clarke and Phelan, we may begin to imagine ways in which subjectivity, “a restlessness and volatility that is resistant to formulation and codification” (p. 4), develops not in spite of, but *in relation to* demands for linearity and predictable outcomes in teacher preparation.

Over the past two decades, contemporary neo-liberal educational reform movements have capitalized on standardized testing mandates, constructing a deficit narrative regarding the capacity of university-based teacher preparation programs to meet high academic standards and prepare students for entry into a globally competitive workforce. The perception of deficit has resulted in the imposition of professional standards that tie teacher performance to student learning outcomes. In response, education scholars have made the case for teacher preparation as grounded in legitimate forms of scholarly and practical knowledge. In doing so, as Clarke and Phelan (2017) point out, educators have inadvertently been drawn into arguments about quality-assurance, including the orthodoxy that “quality” teaching can function as a panacea for persistent problems of inequality in education.

Discourses of quality-assurance position individual teachers as heroic figures, typically white women who are capable of overcoming what is missing or inadequate within the education system, including the historic and systemic conditions of inequality that shape student success. The irony, as Clarke and Phelan (2017) argue, is that the focus on quality assurance, “only fuels the anxieties of teacher educators and pre-service students with the need to meet certification requirements outlined in the teaching standards supplanting concern with the political and ethical dilemmas of teaching” (p. 3). In the summer and fall of 2020, for example, in the context of the global coronavirus pandemic, teachers were under pressure to return to schools and classrooms in spite of the fact that public schools were ill-equipped to ensure the health and safety of everyone involved. Amidst the crisis, the “heroic teacher” became an essential worker, expected to accept the risk of illness, and possible death, both to ensure that students can learn and that working parents have access to the child care and social services needed to drive the economy.

Although anxiety and uncertainty feature prominently within the culture of teacher preparation programs today, the field of teacher education is imbued with certainty and consensus

regarding professional knowledge—what teachers should know and be able to do. This sense of certainty and consensus structures the learning objectives, standards, and dispositions used to determine pre-service student success. According to Clarke and Phelan (2017), consensus is created by an education system that renders standardization as natural, “as in unmade by humans, inevitable, and *instinctively felt to be right*—and ‘imperative’—as essential, urgent, and authoritative” (p. 38, emphasis added). With the threat of externally imposed objectives in mind, Clarke and Phelan argue, the teacher is reduced to her effects; the actualization of who she must be is based on what she must demonstrate and do.

For Clarke and Phelan (2017), this focus on outcomes and effects is at once a professional imperative—failure to meet expectations can lead to disqualification from the profession—and a form of emotional closure—standardization is *felt to be right*. Paradoxically, the certainties that constitute professional knowledge of teaching leave little space for forms of thinking and intellectual labor made from ambivalence, questioning, and dreaming. With Clarke and Phelan, we might wonder how the relentless focus on actualizing teacher potential, “serves to restrict, rather than enlarge, the subjectivity of the teacher” (p. 6) in teacher preparation programs today. What would it mean to sustain the tension inherent in Clarke and Phelan’s “expanded notion of teacher education” (p. 4) as constitutive of subjects existing in relation to, but expanding beyond, the constraints of institutional structures?

Britzman’s (2016) research on the educational significance of the child psychoanalyst Melanie Klein lends insight into the role of anxiety and symbolization necessary for “undoing” emotional closure in teacher preparation. Klein’s clinical work brings us to an adjacent scene of educational reality, an internal world in which the infant or child’s capacity to ascribe meaning to the world outside of herself is subject to the vicissitudes of her emotional experience. Britzman writes,

The tiny infant too experiences the force of depression: terrors of not knowing, inexplicable situations of mental annihilation, a fall into empty space, and a fear of losing a mind that, at first, cannot grasp the cusp of external reality. And the afterlife of impressive natality proposes that the wishes of education—those that define learning as progressive, reasonable, only conscious, and adaptive to the teacher’s instructions—are vulnerable to the human’s proclivity to love and to hate. (p. 2)

A feature of Kleinian development is the emotional complexity she afforded to the human from the beginning of life. It was Klein’s discovery that, through play, infants and very young children communicate the emotional situation of their internal world of fantasy and object relations, as Britzman (2016) points out, “as a constellation of anxiety, frustration, aggression, and the ego’s mechanisms or functions of defenses that [Klein] thought of as constituting the inner world” (p. 2). In her clinical work with children, Klein was interested in the underside of education’s wish for progress and mastery over knowledge: the pain of integrating emotional reality with the world outside of ourselves and how resistance to thinking about the emotional world led to inhibitions in learning. For Klein, anxiety was both an obstacle to learning and a necessary form of incompleteness, a signal from the archaic reaches of the mind that calls our attention inward, toward the situation of vulnerability that enables thinking about emotional reality.

Britzman’s (2016) study of Kleinian education reminds us that unlike Freud, for whom the dream was the primary object of interpretation in the psychoanalytic clinic, Klein worked closely with children’s play and learning inhibitions as associative objects. As Britzman explains, “Klein

would think of the child's play through the means of representation taken from Freud's understanding of the transformation of thinking in dream life" (p. 45). In her consulting room, Klein observed how children busied themselves with toys, paying particular attention to how they moved between various activities and materials (cutting out paper, experimenting with water, drawing, play-acting, and so on). The materials the children chose, how they made imaginative use of them, and their reasons for changing from one activity to another, were the child's method of dreaming while awake. Klein's free associative method of play opened space for emotive communications between child and analyst, becoming the means to transform the child's expressions of frustration, anxiety, love, and hate, into what Britzman (2016) terms, "the uncertain work of symbolization" (p. 9).

For Klein, knowledge of interiority stirs anxiety not simply because this knowledge is partial and incomplete, but because the work of thinking about the internal world can take on a terrifying literalness. In Marcus's (2003) study of the dreamlife of medical school, medical students' dreams suggest how the external world of curriculum and professional knowledge becomes entangled with the intimate world of object relations. With Britzman's (2016) study of Klein as a resource, we might notice how the "evolving emotional storylines" (Marcus, 2003, p. 368) of the medical students' dreams contain the knowledge of life and death needed for professional training and, moreover, how this internal, emotional situation stirred the medical students' anxiety of not knowing what this knowledge would come to mean. We might see in the medical students' turn toward curriculum as a flawed object a hint of idealization, a form of defense that Britzman (2016) refers to as, "the defense of perfectability" (p. 8). For the medical students, the focus was on improving the curriculum as a means to settle anxiety, master the object, and reassure the vulnerable self. In teacher preparation programs, we might notice how the splitting of theory and practice and the preoccupation with classroom management function as "defenses of perfectability," protecting the pre-service student subject against a worry that, in the face of uncertainty, everything—the self, the classroom, the curriculum—might fall apart.

The move toward thinking about the curriculum as a problem to be fixed or perfected signals students' attempt to master, in the outside world of object relations, the difficulty of the encounter with knowledge on the inside. As Britzman (2016) suggests, symbolization invites an additional move, toward a conceptualization of thinking that stays close to indeterminacy and the play of meaning between what is inside and what is outside. "The problem," as Britzman (2016) puts it, "is how we might transform, along with Klein, inchoate activities of frustration, hate, and love into the poignancy of a forgiving narrative" (p. 9). In such a narrative, the desire to perfect the curriculum would allow for the emotional vulnerability needed for the symbolic work of repair. Britzman continues, "Part of the human condition involves not only being in the world but also crafting an interest in symbolizing its uncertainties and the slow work of self-transformation" (p. 17). Symbolization, a form of thinking with the emotional world, would then become a resource in teacher preparation for necessary processes of learning to tolerate uncertainty and incompleteness, and transforming these painful emotional states into creative forms of expression. Following Marcus (2003), how might our work with becoming teachers engaged in a professional training program create conditions for representing the "evolving emotional storylines" (p. 368) of knowing and not knowing?

Emotional Storylines in Teacher Preparation

In the process of developing a relation to professional knowledge, skills, and competencies, there is always another story being told. Like dreams, these “other stories” contain the complexity and incompleteness needed to function as a resource for symbolization and thinking about emotional reality. I began this paper with one such story of my experience of program development; specifically, the process of writing a proposal for a new undergraduate art teacher preparation program. At the time, I was not fully aware of the overwhelming pressure I felt to write a successful proposal; I can now see my attempt to manage the anxiety as an exercise in Britzman’s (2016) “defense of perfectibility” (p. 8). Writing the proposal involved writing curricula and course descriptions, identifying learning objectives, and aligning these artifacts with state standards and assessment procedures. I fantasized, anxiously, about submitting an incomplete proposal, with gaps in the curriculum or mismatches between learning objectives and assessment rubrics. During those months of proposal writing, preoccupied with what I imagined was missing or incomplete, I wasn’t getting much sleep. Several months after the program was approved, toward the end of the spring semester, I had the following dream.

I am standing in a busy classroom full of middle school students. The windows and doors of the classroom are open, the sun is pouring in, and students are wandering in and out, between the classroom and a grassy yard outside. I am watching the students and wondering if it is ok that they are moving about so freely, in and out of the classroom. I can’t see them when they go outside ... should I be worried that I don’t know exactly where they are? I look over my shoulder where I see a tall, blonde woman wearing a beige skirt and sweater standing in the corner of the room. She looks to be about my age. She is writing something down on a clipboard. I hear myself think, in the dream, “Oh, the evaluation lady is here.” For a brief moment, I wonder if I should do something: Should I bring the students inside? Close the windows and doors? I stand in the middle of the room, doing nothing. And then I wake up.

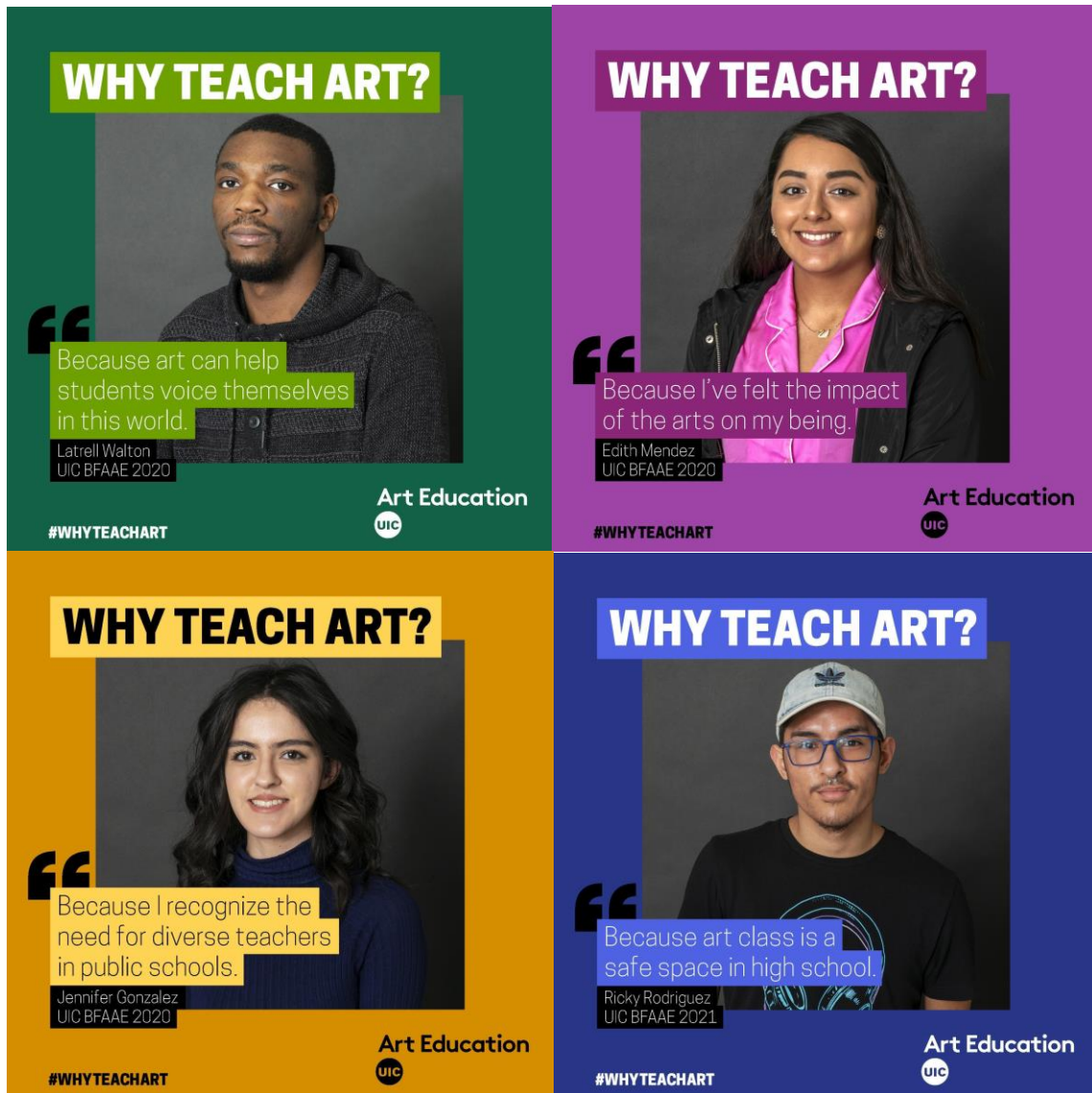
During my first year of teaching in the new program, as the only faculty member working closely with a tiny, inaugural cohort of five students, I had been quietly struggling with how best to introduce a group of young artists to the discourses and demands of teacher preparation without overwhelming them; I worried the program might deaden the creativity that brought the students to art teacher preparation in the first place. An anecdote from the first year of the program is useful in illustrating how my dream of the middle school classroom opened space for the anxiety of incompleteness to become a resource for enlivened engagement.

The students had worked hard to meet the demands of curricular and licensure requirements and to craft, however tentatively, new understandings of themselves in the hybrid, developmental space of pre-service students and future teachers. The end of the semester was close, and a sense of fatigue and depletion was palpable. I wondered if we had run out of things to talk about. Somewhat spontaneously, in class, I decided to share my dream about the middle school classroom, the students wandering in and out, and the evaluation lady. As the students listened, I saw a few raised eyebrows, a few heads slowly nodding. What was this curious dream disclosure? What were they to make of it? Even I wasn’t entirely sure. “I think...” I heard myself say haltingly, “I’m trying to think about our year together, about our program, the one we’re building together. I’m also starting to picture next year, you will be going into student teaching. We’ll be doing that together ... for the first time.” There was a lengthy pause, and then a typically quiet, serious student piped up, “I’m going to be freaking out.” Everyone laughed.

Looking back, I now see this unplanned moment as an example of how symbolization can function in teacher preparation as a method, as Britzman (2016) writes, “of calling forth anxiety to place it into a field of words and then to make something creative from its terrifying scenario affects” (p. 3). In my dream, the reality structures of standardization and evaluation in teacher preparation are represented as part of a complex, symbolic scene: a busy classroom with open doors and windows, where “middle school” students move freely and fluidly between inside and outside. The anxiety of incompleteness has not gone away, as the symbolic presence of an “evaluation lady” suggests. Like the medical students who dream of being on the receiving end of invasive procedures, in my dream I feel a little helpless, a little impotent. I’m not sure what to do. This uncertainty, this “undoing,” made room for an internal shift in waking life; I was able to see the program from a new vantage. The anxiety of proposal writing had been mitigated and transformed, through the aesthetic activity of dreaming, into the possibility of a lively and enlivening classroom exchange.

What would it mean to notice and creatively represent the “evolving emotional storylines” (Marcus, 2003, p. 368) of teacher preparation and professional life? What forms might the dream work of teacher preparation take? While we cannot plan curriculum, teaching, and learning around actual experiences of dreaming, in my view, teacher preparation is a context for finding and creating various forms of dreamlike data: journals, art works, autobiographical narratives, and so on. Such data would open thinking in teacher preparation to what happens when developmental processes of learning meet and refashion narratives of uncertainty and incompleteness into “forgiving narratives” (Britzman, 2016) of emotional and symbolic complexity. Returning to Freud’s (1914/2001) understanding of the dreamwork, in such narratives, the “either-or” thinking of teacher preparation (e.g., success or failure, mastery or inadequacy) would be replaced by the conjunction, “and,” thus, allowing defended and anxious versions of ourselves “equal rights to co-exist” (Freud, 1914/2001, p. 24) with transformative and emergent self-representations.

I can offer one additional example of dreamlike data constituting an “emotional storyline” (Marcus, 2003, p. 368) of becoming in an art teacher preparation program. During my first year of coordinating the new program, student recruitment was on my mind. As I thought about ways to promote the program to future students, I wanted to feature current students, their creativity and accomplishments, while also situating their stories in relation to the art teachers they were working to become. During the program planning process, I had reached out to Grow Your Own Teachers Illinois (GYO, <https://growyourownteachers.org/>), a Chicago-based non-profit organization that works to diversify the teaching profession in the state. A competitive program and vital source of support for pre-service students of color, GYO provides students with mentorship, academic advising, and up to \$25,000 in tuition relief in their lifetimes. In January of 2018, five students in our inaugural class were accepted to this program. The good news led me to a kernel of an idea for a promotional campaign that began with the question, *Why Teach Art?*



Why Teach Art? began as an open-ended investigation in which pre-service student Latrell Walton photographed himself and his peers. The photographs, taken in a professional studio in the Art Department, are reminiscent of annual school “picture day” portraits or high school yearbook photos. Layered with text selected from a teaching philosophy essay the students were writing for class, the students’ facial expressions hint at the emotional complexity and significance of their thoughts, worries, and professional aspirations. While some students reflected on their experiences of art education in high school, both positive and negative, others focused on the current and future role(s) they would play in decolonizing art education and helping to diversify the field of teacher preparation. The final step in the process involved some simple graphic design work in Google Slides, followed by a round of layout and color correction by a staff designer. As the program grows, so does the *Why Teach Art?* archive.

While the archive features individual students and their stories, it does so by evoking the sense in which symbolization and thinking are part of “the slow work” (Britzman, 2016, p. 17) of uneven development and self-transformation in teacher preparation. If we stay close to Ogden’s

(2010) view of dream life as a waking activity, attention to dreamlike data can lead to transformative versions of thinking in which, “one creates a new way of ordering experience that allows one to generate types of feeling, forms of object relatedness, and qualities of aliveness that had previously been unimaginable” (p. 318). Cultivating this version of thinking in teacher preparation would have less to do with tapping into the existing potential of the pre-service student—what they know or what they can do—than with attending to what is tentative and emergent within students’ narratives of self-exploration.

Conclusion

Throughout the paper, I have explored some possibilities for creative agency to be found, and the potential for thought recovered, within painful moments of anxiety and professional uncertainty in teacher preparation. A close reading of dream-narratives written by medical students brought into focus the conditions that inhibit or enliven thinking and emotional complexity in professional spheres of education; in particular, for students who are learning to understand their work as a question of how to think well in relation to other people in transitional states of uncertainty, vulnerability, and change. A persistent problem for teacher preparation is that, amidst the pressure of external demands for certainty and bureaucratic structures of professional accountability, it has become very difficult to think at all. Kelley (2002), writing about the critical role of “freedom dreaming” in the Black radical imagination, describes the conditions that inhibit thinking and creativity within movements for social change:

Sometimes I think the conditions of daily life, of everyday oppressions, or survival, not to mention the temporary pleasures accessible to most of us, render much of our imaginations inert. We are constantly putting out fires, responding to emergencies, finding temporary refuge, all of which make it difficult to see anything other than the present. (p. 10)

For Kelley (2002), “freedom dreaming” acts as a symbolic refuge from the demands of external reality, making space for the languages of art and poetry to help us, “envision a different way of seeing, perhaps a different way of feeling” (p. 11). In the context of teacher preparation, I am interested in how the aesthetic activities of dreamwork become a refuge from *and* a vital resource for navigating the everyday work of understanding—within the nexus of our imaginative, institutional, and evaluative structures—how anxiety is produced and transformed into possibilities for revitalizing the meaning of professional life.

Kelley’s (2002) depiction of the everyday conditions that inhibit imagination resonates with my experience of feeling overwhelmed by the reality structures and demands of teacher preparation during the process of planning a new program. In my dream, I stand at the center of a bustling, beautiful classroom full of sunlight and freedom of movement. There are no fires to put out, no problems to be fixed, nothing to perfect. The “evaluation lady” has receded into the background, allowing anxiety to be dispersed and making room for uncertainty and symbolic fluency within the emotional situation of the dream. There are parts of the scene that I am unable to know: What are the “middle school” students up to as they move in and out of the classroom? Where do they go when I can’t see them? Perhaps the students’ movement in the dream can be interpreted as symbolizing incompleteness as a provisional, but emotionally enlivening, space of meaning-making between external structures and internal, emotional realities. While the anxiety I

felt in doing nothing, so palpable in the dream, threatened to undo the beautiful scene, a dream of doing nothing made way for a return to waking life, and to my work, with something more to work with.

Notes

1. I am grateful to Anne Becker, Christopher Bernu, Aginah Muhammad, and Jennifer Olsen for their support and wisdom during the proposal writing process.
2. A unique course entitled, “Thriving in Residency” (<https://www.thrivinginresidency.com/>) designed by psychotherapist and psychoanalyst in training Ramya Iyer, addresses the emotional situation of medical training. Iyer (2020) writes, “I found residents to be high functioning and capable but they had little support and were often burned out. Though the need for therapy was there, they didn’t have an easy time accessing or sustaining treatment.”

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